

# Nazism and Communism Are Two Sides of the Collectivist Coin

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5-6 minutes

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In 2016, [I toured](#) the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia, which memorializes the victims of [communist butchery](#) in that nation.

Earlier today, I was lucky enough to get a tour through the [House of Terror](#), a [museum in Budapest](#) that commemorates the horrors that Hungary endured during both Nazi occupation and Soviet occupation.

## House of Terror

Some of the exhibits are uplifting, such as the photo from the 1956 uprising that shows a toppled statue of Stalin.



Other parts are downright depressing.

Or, in the case of these torture instruments, certain exhibits are utterly horrifying (you can use your imagination to figure out what the communists did with the glass tubes).



If you go to Hungary, the House of Terror should be on your list of things to do.

I was particularly gratified to learn that it's the most-visited museum in Budapest. Not simply because it's filled with interesting material, but because it helps people understand that [all forms of statism are wrong](#).

The House of Terror has exhibits on the brutality of Nazi rule and the brutality of Marxist rule.

Which is a good excuse for me to share excerpts from a couple of columns on [the common thread](#) between fascism and socialism.

## All Forms of Statism Are Wrong

In a column last November for the Foundation for Economic Education, Brittany Hunter [shared](#) some of Friedrich Hayek's analysis of the philosophical link between national socialism and international

socialism.

F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, ...in chapter twelve, ...Hayek highlights the very important connection between the socialist and Nazi intellectuals by profiling a handful of prominent German Marxist supporters... Hayek points out that contrary to what many think, Nazism did not simply appear out of thin air and infect the minds of docile German people. There were academic roots that, while grown in the soil of socialist thought, grew into a philosophy that praised German superiority, ultimate war, and the degradation of the individual.

...Beginning his list of influential thinkers prior to WWII, Hayek begins with the dedicated Marxist who later embraced nationalism and dictatorship, Werner Sombart (1863-1941). ... He seethed with criticism for the English people, who, in his mind, had lost their warlike instincts. ...His other main criticism of English culture was the emphasis placed on the individual. For Sombart, individual happiness was hampering societies from being truly great. ...Professor Johann Plenge (1874-1963) was another leading intellectual authority on Marxist thought during this time. He also saw war with England as a necessary struggle between two opposite principles: emphasis on the individual and organization and socialism. ...Interestingly enough, many...socialist philosophers eventually abandoned Marxism in favor of National Socialism... while Prussian militarism was seen to be the enemy of socialism, Spengler helped bridge that gap. Both schools of thought require an abandonment of the individual identity. ...This hatred and fear of the individual is the worldview espoused by these thinkers and it continues on with those who claim to be socialists today. Unless the concept of individualism is completely eradicated, the glorified state cannot come into existence."

Earlier this year, Byron Chiado [echoed](#) this analysis of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* in another FEE column, pointing out that all forms of socialism reject classical liberalism.

The bulk of the book makes the argument that central planning and interventionism inevitably lead to authoritarianism... Towards the end of the book, he deals with the undeniable authoritarians of his time and casts the national-socialist movement as one built on disgust with liberalism. ...Sombart, like many Germans in the early 20th century, was compelled by a case for war between the British and Germany on the grounds that the British...pursuit of individual happiness, which he saw as a disease contracted from a society built on commercialism. Laissez-faire was an unnatural anarchic order giving rise to parasites and dishonest merchants... another Marxist, Sociologist Johann Plenge...moved into the shamelessly totalitarian realm that attracted so many Marxist leaders... Hayek gives...a warning to England; that the "conservative socialism" en vogue at the time was a German export, which for reasons he details throughout the book, will inevitably become totalitarian. ...This was not a sensationalist attempt to prove his point. Hayek was rather calmly pointing out an example of the type of government one could expect in a society that has discarded liberalism for planning."

Amen. Big government [is coercive government](#), regardless of what label is applied.

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Which is why libertarianism (what Hayek would have called liberalism, meaning [classical liberalism](#)) is the proper philosophy of government. Assuming, of course, one values individual rights and civil society.

# Why Socialism is Always Oppressive, Dictatorial and Corrupt

Posted on [May 22, 2016](#)

*This essay is Part 2 of a three-part series on socialism:*



Theorists and socialist leaders in the Communist ideological tradition.

In the [first essay in this series](#), I gave the definition of socialism offered in the Oxford English Dictionary and explained why the essential idea of socialism is immoral. Even in its “purest” and most democratic form, socialism is inherently unjust and will lead to mass poverty.

In this essay, I will explain why many historical examples of countries that called themselves “socialist,” such as the Soviet Union and China, were in fact socialist, (contrary to the protestations of many of today’s socialists) and explore why the more consistent implementations of socialism have always resulted in dictatorship, oppression and corruption.

Again from the Oxford English Dictionary, **socialism** is defined as:

A political and economic theory of social organization that advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.

First, let’s look at what this definition does **not** say: It does *not* say that everyone must have equal wealth or income. It does *not* say that money must be abolished. It does *not* say that the state or political leadership must be abolished. (The abolition of the state and political leadership were supposed to be features of Marx’s communist utopia that would arise out of socialism.)

A key part of what the definition *does* say, that gives us a clue to the basic idea underlying socialism, is the last part: “owned or regulated by the *community as a whole*.” Socialism is based on the idea that the

community as a whole has interests apart from individual interests, and at least in some cases, community interests override individual interests. A community as a whole can allegedly make decisions that protect or further those interests. This forms the basis for why socialist ideologies believe that the community as a whole has the right to own and regulate property.

The idea that the community as a whole (or any other group) has interests, rights, and the ability to make decisions apart from individuals, is called collectivism. Collectivism treats the group—in this case, the community—as though it were a single living organism, with individuals as parts or cells of its body. Under this view, the individuals are inherently dependent on the whole for everything in their life. Individuals' choices are entirely determined by their circumstances and place in the community, and separation from the community means a loss of personal purpose and rapid death for an individual. Thus, the community, as the agent responsible for everything an individual is, has the right to determine how goods and services will be produced and distributed.

This collectivism is the underlying justification for socialism: The community—whether or not it consists exclusively of “the proletariat class” (wage-workers)—has the ability and the right to distribute “its” property to suit its own best interests. (Individualism would say that, since individuals think for themselves, start businesses and are the fundamental agents of wealth creation, they should each be able to keep what they individually create or trade for. The “community as a whole” has no rights over individuals' creations.)

Collectivism is deeply, fundamentally wrong. Individuals are the units of humanity that live or die, think, and make choices. Each individual has a mind and must think for himself, if he is to understand. Individuals are not telepathically joined into a “collective consciousness,” and must each think in the privacy of their own minds in order to learn from others; (to learn, as opposed to parroting word sounds.) (For more on the issue of individualism versus collectivism, see: [What is Individualism? What is Collectivism?](#))

### **A Redefinition of “Socialism” in Accordance With Reality**

Since the “community as a whole” is simply a poorly defined and potentially unlimited collection of individuals, there actually is no such thing as “ownership or regulation by the community as a whole.” (Nor is there ownership/regulation by “the worker class as a whole.”) What there is, is government: an institution that consists of a definite collection of select individuals legally empowered, and working together, to enact and enforce laws. It is this institution that has always carried out (legally enacted) what collectivists think should be done by “the community as a whole.” So the definition of “socialism” should actually be:

A political and economic theory of social organization that advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by government.

Full socialism means that the government claims ownership of “the means of production, distribution, and exchange.” So nations like the Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Fidel Castro's Cuba definitely *were* socialist, to a very large extent.

It is the laws of government that define whether and how property rights are to be protected. Thus it is government that sets the fundamental terms of economic relationships between individuals. So



socialists have generally seen their favored form of government as the embodiment or primary instrument of “the community as a whole.” (1)

It is the conflict between reality and the collectivism underlying socialism that is the reason socialism is always oppressive to some degree, and why it generally manifests as a corrupt dictatorship in its fuller forms.

### **Dictatorships and Single-Party Legislatures**

The fact that people are individuals, with their own thoughts, their own interests, and their own lives to lead, means that pure, direct democracy is not a practical system for the running of all the business in a community. If individuals had to vote in meetings on every major decision of every company in their city, along with all governmental decisions, they would have to spend most of their time going to such meetings, and could get very little done in their actual jobs. So, in any attempt to implement socialism in any modern setting, people will have to use some sort of system of representatives.

This point alone seems innocuous enough: It would just mean that socialism has to exist in the form of representative democracies. These democracies could have free and fair elections, and thus be like modern mixed economies in their governments, right?

Well here’s where the collectivist nature of socialism comes in. As a collectivist doctrine, socialism views the community as a sort of organism in itself, not as a collection of individuals. Individuals are just little pieces of the entity of importance, which is the community of workers. Socialists observe that individuals, left free, are frequently “selfish” and “blinded by their private interests,” and so don’t reflect “the interests of the greater community” in their thinking. They disagree with each other all the time on so many things. So why would socialists think that a free and fair election would produce an accurate reflection of the “interests of the community as a whole”? It’s just a poll of a bunch of individuals, each expressing their own private views and interests. If we go by the majority, then we are ignoring the minority. So we aren’t seeing the “interests of the whole” expressed.

In order to see the interests of the whole community, socialist leaders reason, what we need is **unity**. Unity of purpose, unity of thought, unity of interests, (often referred to as “solidarity”)—these are the keys to maintaining and improving the life of the community. The community needs to *speak with one voice*, and act as one great body. This will eliminate unproductive private squabbling. (To the collectivist, private squabbling/disagreement is the societal equivalent of a man’s kidneys not working in harmony with his liver: very bad for the survival of the whole man.)

The natural choice for the community’s *one great voice* is the leader of the representatives chosen by the community: the head of state. He becomes the “brain” of the “societal organism,” and his voice speaks for the unified interests of the community.

Given this view of the community as being like a single organism, there is no reason to have more than one political party. The leading party is like the central nervous system that carries the will of the community’s “brain” down to all of the parts, making them all work in harmony. Having parties other than the leader’s would be like having a nervous system that sends conflicting signals from sources other than the brain. Again, this would be disruptive and destructive to the organism. Unity requires a single party in the legislature.

Under the influence of this collectivist viewpoint, individuals stop trusting themselves to make their own decisions, especially when it comes to politics. Even if they don't literally think of themselves as being like cells of one great body, the cultural influence of collectivism gives each of them the feeling that their relationship with their leader is like that of a small child to her father. Individuals can't be trusted to judge for themselves, so their leader is seen as a father-figure and a hero that they are very much dependent upon and subservient to.

If such "little children" are presented with a choice between their "father" and some strange man who wants to adopt them, whom do you think they will choose? Unless their "father" is SO blatantly and constantly abusive, that whatever tiny remnant of individual judgment they have screams at them to get away, they will choose their "father" every time.

This is the logic underlying the single-party personality cults that have pervaded many heavily collectivist countries, not only Marxist and socialist, but fascist as well: the Soviet Union, North Korea, Mao's China, Fidel Castro's Cuba, Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy, Ceaușescu's Romania, and Chavez's Venezuela.

Higher degrees of socialism are based on higher degrees of collectivism. Yet a certain degree of individualism is required to sustain free and democratic elections. Individuals have to have enough confidence in their own individual minds to demand the right to an uncoerced, fair vote for their political leaders. Socialism, as a form of collectivism, destroys that confidence, and thus leads people not to consider free and fair elections important. As socialism grows in the culture, solidarity and obedience become more "important" than individual freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and fair elections.

### **Coercive Central Planning**

The above discussion should indicate the basic reason why central planning is natural to socialism: The attempt to put a collectivist system into practice requires someone to "speak for the community as a whole" and act as the brain of the community. In order to act as the brain of the community, he must have central control of as many aspects of the community as possible, including where people work, what they produce, and how much they produce.

This central planning involves a great deal of dictatorial coercion. Individuals may not wish to work where the leader wants, or in the way the leader wants. And they won't have the incentive of personal profits or realizing personal goals to lead them to start businesses: Everyone who didn't start a business will profit just as much as they do, without having exerted the effort, and control will be taken from them as soon as they hire workers. So the creation of business will have to be done by the coercive central planning of the government, along with overall management of businesses.

### **Corruption**

Human beings are not mindless cells of one great body, nor robotic worker bees that can toil endlessly for the good of the hive. To keep going, people need pleasures. They need rewards beyond a pat on the head from the "Dear Leader." (If you doubt this, try to imagine living without movies, novels, video games, sweet foods, or sexual activity of any kind for the rest of your life.)



Yet endless toil and sacrifice for the good of the community is what collectivism demands of an individual, if he is to act from completely “pure” motives. Any desires or personal interests of his, beyond bare physical sustenance, are “corrupt.” This is because any personal desires or goals would need to be pursued at the expense of the individual’s devotion to the collective: In those instances, he is not acting as a selfless worker bee, toiling away for the hive.

So this is the collectivist version of Original Sin: Every individual has personal desires, and will break down if he doesn’t at least pursue some of them, some of the time. All are stained from birth with personal desire, and deep down, all are unworthy of unqualified praise, (except perhaps the leader, who speaks and acts for the community as a whole.)

So if everyone is corrupt to some extent, and the attempt to be pure brings only pain and suffering, while corruption brings pleasure and relief, what’s a little more corruption? Individuals are what their upbringing, genetics and environment make of them, goes the collectivist-determinist line. So if an individual becomes more corrupt, that’s not his fault, it’s just that society hasn’t evolved to the point where individuals can be pure. (Marx’s term for this type of “pure” individual is the “New Man.” The New Man will be brought about by the economic conditions of pure communism. In the Soviet Union, this idea became the “New Soviet Man.”)

So individuals in a heavily socialist-collectivist society have no real motivation to resist or combat corruption. Corruption is just human nature to them, until the evolution of the community changes human nature and guarantees people will be “pure.”

Thus, in all heavily socialist countries, we see rampant kickbacks, favoritism, nepotism, and the appropriation of public funds for personal luxuries. In places like the USSR, China, and North Korea, we see the spectacle of fat-cat leaders who drink champagne at public expense while many of their “comrades” go hungry. (Of course, if anything in a collectivist society **is** worthy of individual reward, it is devotion to the community as a whole. Under socialism, who exemplifies this better than the leadership of the workers’ party? So this is further reason for open displays of luxury by the leadership to be accepted as normal.)

### **Mass Imprisonment and Mass Murder**

Under collectivism, it is the community as a whole that matters, not individuals. So, to the extent collectivism is embraced, this means that the representatives of the community as a whole may do anything to individuals they deem necessary for the good of the community. This includes mass imprisonment, exile, and execution. To a stalwart collectivist, a mass execution for the sake of the community is no more heinous than a doctor cutting off a man’s gangrenous foot to save his life.

Thus we see the imprisonment of political dissidents all across the socialist (and fascist) world. We see political prisoners in the gulags of the Soviet Union, the forced labor camps in China under Mao (laogai), and the horrific labor/death camps of North Korea.

We also see mass murder perpetrated by these socialist regimes. For just a few examples among many, we can recall the mass purges (executions) by Stalin, the engineered famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-33 (Holodomor), the Tiananmen Square Massacre in China, and the ongoing starvation and executions in North Korea’s labor/death camps.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, socialism is based on collectivism, (as is fascism.) The people of a society, to the extent they embrace collectivism, will consider the rights and interests of individuals unimportant, relative to the “rights and interests of the community.” This naturally leads to totalitarianism, central planning, stagnation, corruption, and the inhumane treatment of individuals, including the starvation of political prisoners in forced labor camps. Whenever and wherever a high degree of socialism is tried, it leads to disaster. (At the time I write this, Venezuela is experiencing an almost complete breakdown, due to its experimentation with socialism.)

Of course, many people who call themselves “socialists” today will claim they don’t support “extreme” collectivism, or the complete abolition of private property in the means of production. They want a “balance” between individualism and collectivism, like in Scandinavian countries.

But, as I argued in [What is Individualism? What is Collectivism?](#), the truth does not reside between “extreme” individualism and “extreme” collectivism. The truth is pure individualism. So those who act to achieve a “balance” between the two are acting on false ideas, and will necessarily do damage by attempting to enact their “balanced socialism.”

In the [last part](#) of this series of essays, I discuss Bernie Sanders and partially socialist regulatory/welfare states, and why they are unjust and destructive of prosperity in the world. Click here for **Part 3: [Bernie Sanders and the Injustice of “Democratic Socialism”](#)**.

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(1) Some who call themselves socialists may object at this point that their socialism is not based in government. They define socialism as “worker control of the means of production,” and they favor cooperative enterprises, where the workers directly control their own companies. Each coop is owned by its own workers, not the government. There are two alternatives for someone who advocates for coops. The first is that the person thinks that individuals who build businesses can retain property rights in what they have built, while hiring workers who choose wage-labor as their sole responsibility and a wage as their sole compensation. But the person just advocates that groups of workers should choose to build businesses themselves and own/manage their own workplace. This sort of person is advocating a capitalist governmental system. Voluntary coops can and do exist under capitalism, and such a person is merely advocating that more people should choose this sort of organization. (Note that the difference between capitalism and socialism is a difference in governmental systems, not merely economic “modes of production.” The difference between the two lies in what the government recognizes as rights, especially, whether or not it recognizes individual rights to property used as means of production.)

The second alternative is that the person thinks that anyone who builds a business and hires wage-workers, should lose her personal property right to what she built. (As with Jill in the [previous essay in this series](#).) As soon as wage-workers are hired, the government transfers the title of the business to the workers, dividing ownership evenly between them. The person who built the business can then be hired or fired by the decision of the rest of the workers. All workers, so long as they work for any company,

are forced to bear the responsibility of managing the business. This system is not capitalism, but I wouldn't really call it socialism, either. It's rather like what is typically called "syndicalism."

In theory, these companies are going to be competing with each other for product sales and competing for workers. Workers will lose their jobs, and many companies will go out of business. As collectivists see it, there will be a lot of "cutthroat competition," "disharmony," and "bitterness" in the community. The "positive" impulse behind collectivist social movements is to bring unity, peace and harmony to human life. And part of the collectivists' justification for collectivism is that individuals aren't "self-sufficient," (i.e. don't operate in a vacuum.) This same observation applies to businesses. So there is always a push toward larger groups as the goal of human action and the unit of organization. The most naturally stable and common unit for social collectivists is the nation. Thus, I would say this system is ideologically inconsistent with its alleged justification, and it would be very unstable in practice, (not to mention rather stagnant and unproductive, like genuine socialism.)